

In the claims:

1. (Currently amended) A passivating overcoat bilayer for a multilayer reflective coating designed for use in extreme ultraviolet or soft x-ray applications, comprising:

a multilayer reflective coating comprising a plurality of alternating layers of relatively high index material and low index material, wherein said multilayer reflective coating comprises a top surface and a bottom surface;

a substrate, wherein said bottom surface is affixed directly to said substrate;

a bottom overcoat layer affixed directly to a top layer of a said top surface of said multilayer reflective coating; and

a top overcoat layer deposited affixed directly to on said bottom overcoat layer, wherein said bottom overcoat layer comprises material that prevents diffusion of said top overcoat layer into said top layer of said multilayer reflective coating, wherein said top overcoat layer comprises material that resists oxidation and corrosion and protects said multilayer reflective coating from oxidation.

2. The overcoat bilayer of claim 1, wherein said bottom overcoat layer comprises boron carbide.

3. The overcoat bilayer of claim 1, wherein said bottom overcoat layer comprises molybdenum.

4. The overcoat bilayer of claim 1, wherein said bottom overcoat layer comprises carbon.

5, 6. (Canceled)

7. The overcoat bilayer of claim 1, wherein said top overcoat layer comprises ruthenium.

8. The overcoat bilayer of claim 1, wherein said top overcoat layer comprises material selected from the group consisting of Zr, Rh and Pd.

9. The overcoat bilayer of claim 1, wherein said top overcoat layer comprises a plurality of components.

10. The overcoat bilayer of claim 1, wherein said top overcoat layer comprises a plurality of layers.

11. The overcoat bilayer of claim 1, wherein said bottom overcoat layer comprises about 1.3 nm of Mo and wherein said top layer comprises between 0.6 nm and 2 nm of Ru.

12. The overcoat bilayer of claim 1, wherein said bottom overcoat layer comprises B₄C, wherein said top layer of said multilayer coating comprises silicon.

13. (Canceled)

14. The overcoat bilayer of claim 1, wherein said top overcoat layer and said bottom overcoat layer of said overcoat bilayer have optimum thicknesses selected such that the bilayer overcoat is phase-matched with the underlying multilayer coating.

15. The overcoat bilayer of claim 1, wherein said top overcoat layer and said bottom overcoat layer have thicknesses, wherein the thickness of said top overcoat layer is selected to protect the underlying layers from oxidation, and wherein the thickness of the bottom layer is selected such that the bilayer overcoat is phase-matched with the underlying multilayer coating.

16. The overcoat bilayer of claim 1, wherein said top overcoat layer and said bottom overcoat layer have thicknesses that are optimized to maximize the normal incidence reflectance at an operating wavelength of less than about 15 nanometers.

17. The overcoat bilayer of claim 1, wherein said top overcoat layer has a thickness ranging from about 0.5 nanometers to about 7 nanometers.

18. The overcoat bilayer of claim 1, wherein said bottom overcoat layer has a thickness ranging from about 0.5 nanometers to about 7 nanometers.

19. (Currently amended) The overcoat bilayer of claim 1, wherein said multilayer reflective coating comprises ~~a plurality of pairs of underlying layers, and the underlying layers have~~ a reflectance greater than about 65% at an operating wavelength of less than about 15 nanometers.

20. (Currently amended) The overcoat bilayer of claim 19, wherein ~~each underlying pair of layers of said underlying layers comprises said alternating layers comprise~~ a first layer comprising silicon and a second layer comprising molybdenum.

21. (Currently amended) The overcoat bilayer of claim 19, wherein
~~each underlying pair of layers of said underlying layers comprises said~~
alternating layers comprise a first layer comprising beryllium and a second layer
comprising molybdenum.

22. The overcoat bilayer of claim 1, wherein said overcoat bilayer and
said multilayer reflective coating have a normal incidence reflectivity of at least
about 65% at an operating wavelength of less than about 15 nanometers, and
wherein said multilayer reflective coating comprises silicon and molybdenum.

23. The overcoat bilayer of claim 1, wherein said overcoat bilayer and
said multilayer reflective coating have a normal incidence reflectivity of at least
about 65% at an operating wavelength of less than about 15 nanometers, and
wherein said multilayer reflective coating comprises beryllium and
molybdenum.

24-35. (Canceled)